

Value of Workplace Education

**Analysis Of Effects Of *English As A Working Language*
(EWL) Course Conducted By Creative Workplace Learning
At Imperial Distributors Of Auburn, Massachusetts**

Completed in 2004

by

**Lloyd David, Ed.D
Divya Narayanan**

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311 Washington Street
Brighton, MA 02135**

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REPORT OVERVIEW

Imperial Distributors located in Auburn and Worcester, MA is an industry leader in both distribution and merchandising of supermarket non-foods. With 500 employees this privately held company serves over 1,000 supermarket locations throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. In 2003, the company received a grant from the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund which included English as a Working Language classes for some of the workers employed as selectors. Creative Workplace Learning (CWL), a subsidiary of Continuing Education Institute/CEI, developed the curriculum and conducted the classes. Initially, the classes were offered at the company site for 2 hours twice a week with the company paying the salaries for ½ the time. Ultimately, Imperial Distributors and CWL worked out an arrangement whereby the students attended class for 1 hour each day for 5 hours a week on company time.

The design and successful implementation of this program exemplifies the value of workplace education to both the business and the individual workers. I, Lloyd David, presented the plan for both a qualitative and quantitative evaluation study to the company management who were especially interested in the qualitative aspects. Through the CWL program the company management sought to help their employees have a better life in a new and different culture. Divya Narayanan, a graduate student from the MBA program at Suffolk University in Boston, conducted both a quantitative study to show ROI and a qualitative study to show individual changes. The goals of these studies were to show the benefits of a short educational program for both the company and the student. Such programs typically are not good candidates for ROI or other such studies since it is too difficult to isolate all the variables affecting changes. However, a study could hopefully demonstrate the social and psychological benefits for employees which would also impact the business in positive ways.

Interviews of all the students, their supervisors and key management personnel were conducted to study the impact of the classes. Attempts were also made to see if there were any significant changes in attendance and error rates which were also among the stated goals for the grant. The results showed that the classes helped the students in ways far beyond the workplace. Students felt more comfortable living in a predominately English speaking environment and could handle medical, school related and other issues such as dealing with government bureaucracies with greater confidence and a sense of accomplishment. This positive attitude affected their performance at work. Supervisors reported noticeable changes in the work environment. Employees felt good about coming to work. If there were any problems on the job the worker sought out the supervisors for clarification. The supervisors felt less pressure and could do their jobs without the need for translators. The end result was a positive experience for all.

The experience at Imperial Distributors should be viewed by other businesses with significant numbers of workers who need to learn English as an excellent example of how investing in employee education increases productivity and morale. All the workers at Imperial Distributors lived miles from the company, had families and other responsibilities which prevented them from studying English outside of the workplace. Imperial Distributors benefited in many ways from this program in that the classes had a direct relationship to the language skills the workers needed for their jobs, and the workers were grateful to the company for the opportunity to learn. In addition all those employees who participated in the classes are still working at Imperial Distributors which over the years has had a 40% turnover rate.

Section 1. Purpose of Evaluation

Imperial Distributors is a major supplier of non-food products to supermarkets in the eastern part of the United States. In 2003, the company submitted a proposal to the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund for several different kinds of training programs including classes in English as a Working Language (EWL). For many years the company had experienced a great deal of employee turnover accompanied by a high rate of absenteeism. By adopting a retention strategy that focused on providing EWL training for their employees whose jobs are to select products for shipment to the supermarkets, Imperial Distributors hoped to reduce and thereby lessen the negative impact of these two problems.

Imperial Distributors contracted with Continuing Education Institute, the parent-company of Creative Workplace Learning, to provide 2 classes in English as a Working Language. Each class met for a total of 240 hours. Classes began in March 2003 and were originally offered 4 hours a week – two hours on company time and two hours on the worker's time. This schedule proved to be difficult for several students who often had family or other working responsibilities so could not attend the classes after work. In March 2004 the time for each class was changed to 1 hour per day 5 days a week on company time and attendance improved.

Creative Workplace Learning's (CWL) instructors used materials supplied by Imperial Distributors such as personnel policies, work rules, etc. to develop a workplace specific curriculum. This tailored curriculum helped the employees understand, speak, read and write English better so they could communicate with their superiors, comprehend instructions, and express any concerns or problems. Since most of the students are from places where English is not spoken, CWL also included a curriculum to help them in their daily life - when they go shopping; visit a doctor or talk to their child's teachers.

The evaluators discovered that although the English as a Working Language (EWL) classes at Imperial Distributors were initially created to teach the employees a new language, the program became the motivating factor for the employees to stay committed to the organization. Workers feel that their employer has invested in them and in turn they feel loyal to the company. Nine months after the program ended all 14 were still employed at Imperial Distributors which has experienced a turnover rate of around 40%. Though their work does not involve much conversation, knowing English has helped them understand work instructions, write down details when needed and above all to interact with their supervisors and co-workers. The program has helped to create a better work environment and enabled the workers to accept new responsibilities. It has also helped them in their daily life.

Section 2. The Players

Imperial Distributors

Imperial Distributors is recognized throughout the northeast and mid-Atlantic states as a leader in both distribution and merchandising of supermarket non-food products. The mission of Imperial Distributors is to be "The Performance Leader" in Supermarket Non Foods Distribution and Merchandising Services. Today Imperial Distributors is recognized throughout the industry because it has maintained a delicate balance by providing competitive offerings while maintaining quality services. Imperial Distributors provides supermarket customers with a complete range of non-food products. Imperial Distributor's cross-functional teams are trained to ensure successful in-store execution.

Creative Workplace Learning

Creative Workplace Learning™, is a subsidiary of Continuing Education Institute (CEI), of Watertown, MA, a non-profit organization experienced in educating adults in the workplace for over 27 years. More than 10,000 adults have successfully participated in the Creative Workplace Learning programs. CWL was showcased as a 'Best Practice' at the *1999 Summit for 21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs* hosted by Vice President Gore; and was the subject of a book written by Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson of Harvard's Graduate School of Education. CWL has worked with over 60 companies in a wide variety of industries - manufacturing, healthcare, insurance and service. The English as a Working Language program is fully customized to meet the needs of individual companies and their employees. After completing the EWL program, companies have reported that their employees gained more than just a greater command of the English language, but also a greater degree of confidence in their work and their relationships with their supervisors and fellow workers.

Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund

The Workforce Training Fund is a state-funded program financed entirely by Massachusetts' employers. Its purpose is to provide financial resources to Massachusetts businesses to train current and newly hired employees. The Division of Employment and Training (D.E.T.)', an agency of the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development administers the Workforce Training Fund.

"The mission of the Workforce Training Fund is to provide applicants with the resources to invest in the Massachusetts workforce and improve employee skills, and to maintain the economic strength and viability of the Commonwealth's businesses. The Fund's major focus is on small and medium sized businesses that would not be able to make this investment without the assistance of the Fund."

Section 3. Concept and Framework

This research study was designed to measure a company's return on investment by offering English as a Working Language (EWL) classes. The focus was on employee turnover, absenteeism and productivity factors. The 14 employees who enrolled in this program were the target group and other 14 employees who did not enroll for this course served as the comparison group. Data on turnover, absenteeism and productivity of the target group was aligned with the comparison group, and inferences were drawn therefrom. A qualitative assessment summary was conducted for management purposes, based on interviews with the employees enrolled in the class. The demographic aspects of the comparison group were consistent with those in the target group.

Time Frame

The time frame for our research was six months from January 2004 through June 2004.

Methodology

CWL designed a study composed of 4 parts - review of the literature on evaluation, observation of classes and production areas, interviews, and analysis of data concerning the number of errors and attendance at work. Peter McQuaid, Director of Distribution, Productivity and Improvement from Imperial Distributors agreed to provide the data on attendance and error rates for both the target group and the comparison group. Divya Narayanan, a graduate student in the MBA program at Suffolk University, was selected to conduct the research. Ms. Narayanan first reviewed the literature of previous research projects. She designed several different interview instruments for students, teacher, supervisors, and management. Interviews were scheduled during class time so as not to interfere with production. Each interview lasted 15 - 20 minutes and was tape recorded. Summaries of the highlights of the interviews are included as Appendix A and the transcripts of each interview are included as Appendix B. Data on errors and attendance was then analyzed.

Observation

Divya Narayanan attended classes to assess the mode and method of instruction, the learning perspective of the students (employees) and their interests as determined by their class participation, reactions and attendance in the class. Both she and Dr. David observed the students at work and see how their knowledge of English had impacted their performance.

Interviews

Divya Narayanan designed survey instruments, one for the students in the class and the second for the management. She then interviewed each person for roughly 15 minutes. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Both Divya Narayanan and Dr. David interviewed the following management personnel.

Pam O'Connor - Supervisor
Mary Fassett - Supervisor
Peter McQuaid - Director Distribution, Productivity & Improvement
Herb Daitch - Chief Financial Officer
John Macklin - Chief of Operations

Jackie Coelho, the EWL instructor, was also interviewed for her perspective on the individual students and their progress.

The interviews provided information for the qualitative evaluation. Each interview was transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate data. See Appendix B.

Qualitative measures:

- Emotional development e.g. confidence at work etc.
- Motivational levels
- Performance in the EWL class
- Improvement in performance on the job

Section 4. FINDINGS

Qualitative Evaluation

Employee/students

All 14 of the employees reported feeling confident or 'more confident' and felt that they can speak and pronounce English better. Eight employees said that they understand the work instructions, feel satisfied and happy with their job, which in turn boosts a sense of gratitude and loyalty towards the company. Seven employees claimed that EWL classes have also helped them in their daily lives when they go shopping, watch TV, movies, speak over the phone and speak with their child's teacher, a major driving factor for eight employees to enroll in these classes. Four employees said that they feel more motivated as they have learned to read and write in English, have improved their vocabulary and have learned grammar. As a result of the EWL class, they do not need an interpreter anymore and find it easy to speak with the doctor, go alone to any government office and ask for change on the bus. The EWL class has paved the way for them to establish better relations with the supervisors and co-workers, make friends at work and above all communicate effectively. They feel part of the general society.

Management

Herb Daitch Chief Financial Officer when asked what was the main reason for him to decide upon the ESL classes answered as follows: "There is a large portion of our population who does not know English and this creates a lot of communication problems. The communication of job task, special assignments, training and above all anything that would motivate them. There are two things: Someone who is in a new country must know the work language. And turnover is always an issue. To make them feel good about where they work and the people they work with and to help them feel better about Imperial and outside of work.--mainly to ensure that the reason to leave Imperial is not because they do not know the working language here."

Supervisors, Pam O'Connor and Mary Fassett, reported that the students can understand their instructions now and are able to communicate with them and other peers as well.

"The communication is a lot better. I would say 85% better. They do not need to repeat themselves or even get a translator."

"I talk to them all the time about errors. Before when I talked about errors they could not understand. But, now they can understand their errors and even correct them. You don't know there is an error unless they are made known. ESL classes have made them to understand when I say there is an error. There is no doubt about it. They want to succeed now. Each and everyone going to the ESL class want to succeed."

The supervisors also indicated they are experiencing less frustration on the job.

"I myself am very happy about this course. Initially I was frustrated working with these people when they don't know what I am talking and I don't know their language." "I have covered every department and these employees always needed an interpreter and now they don't need one. They feel comfortable and so do I as they understand me."

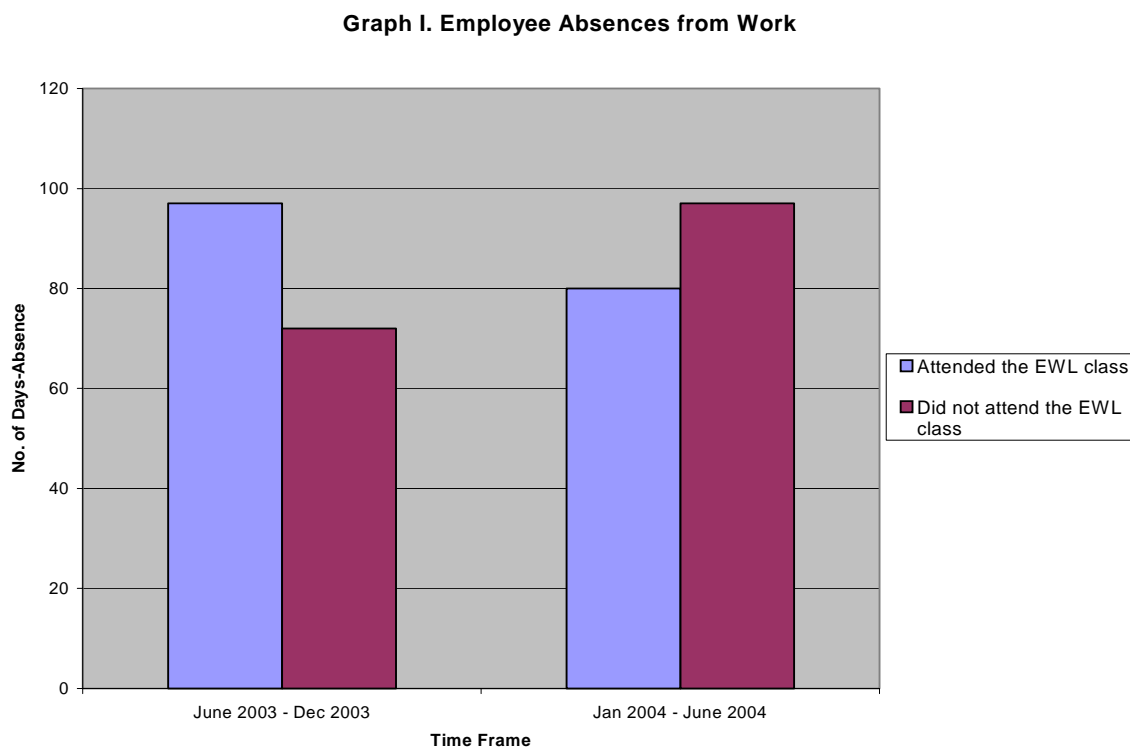
They also reported an increase in productivity since their rates have gone up. There is a productivity increase "...because if they have a question they can ask me now. Before I think they asked among themselves as they were afraid to ask somebody. They were even afraid to say that there was some problem in the line with somebody."

Quantitative Evaluation

The chief researcher, Divya Narayanan, analyzed the attendance records and data on number of errors for both the students in the EWL program and the comparison group for a period of 6 months. The results present a comparison between the target group and the comparison group with respect to the following areas:

- Comparison of the attendance and absenteeism of both groups
- Reduction in error rates
- Employee turnover

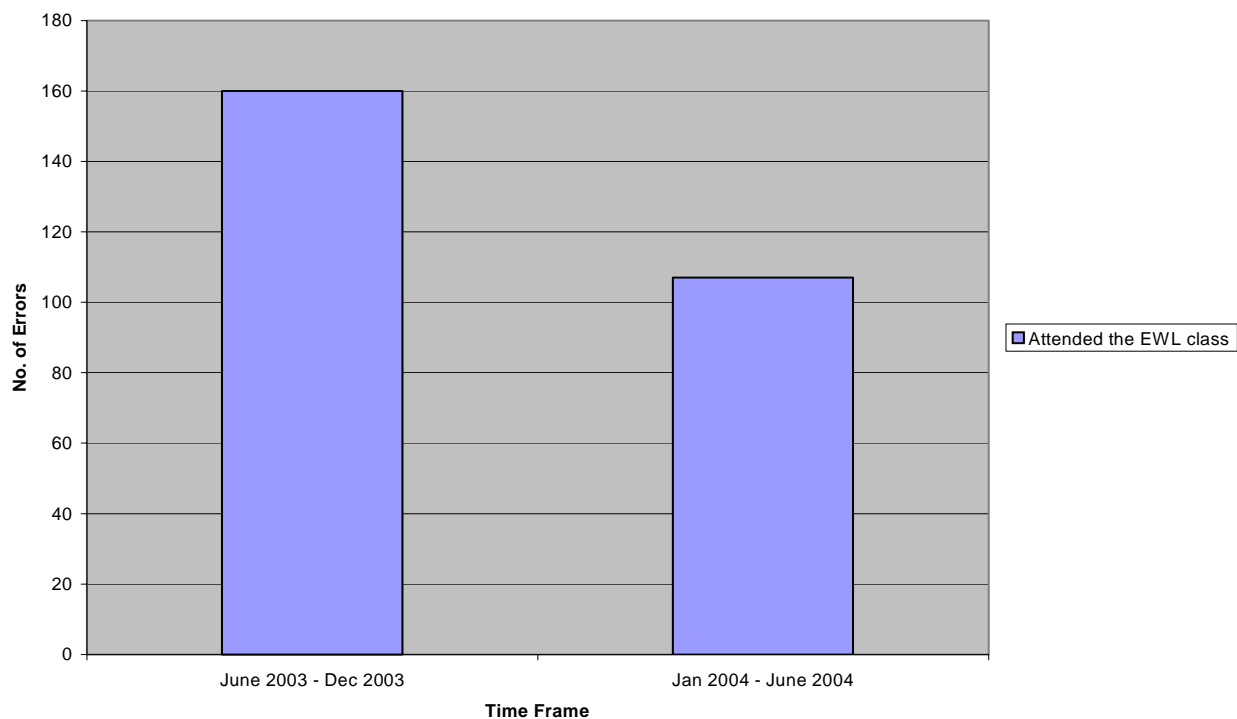
The graph below shows a significant reduction in absenteeism among workers enrolled in the classes.



Graph I shows absentee data for two consecutive six-month periods (June 2003 – Dec 2003 and Jan 2004 – June 2004) on the x-axis and number of days of employee absence along the y-axis. Each six month period shows a comparison between 14 employees who took the EWL class and

a comparison group of 14 employees who did not take the EWL class. During the year 2003 (in the relevant time frame of June 2003 – Dec 2003), the employees who attended the class were absent for a greater number of days (97 days) than those who did not attend the class (72 days). During the 2nd 6-month period from January to June of 2004, (the relevant time when EWL classes were in progress) the absences for those attending the class decreased by 18% (from 97 to 80), whereas the absences for the comparison group increased by 32% (from 72 to 95).

Graph II. Employee Errors at Work



Graph II represents the same two six month periods (June 2003 – Dec 2003 and Jan 2004 – June 2004) on the x-axis and number of errors made by the employees at work along the y-axis. The graph shows a drastic 67% decrease in the number of errors for the 14 employees who took the EWL class from the June 2003 - Dec 2003 period (160 errors) to the January 2004 – June 2004 period (107 errors).

Section 5. Conclusion

The EWL classes were initially looked at as an option for the employees to learn a new language which was seen as a greater benefit to the individual than the company. As it progressed, it was the motivating factor for the employees to stay committed toward the organization, which had spent time and money on their education thereby reducing turnover. Though the nature of work does not involve much conversation, knowing English has helped them to understand work instruction, write down details when needed and above all to interact with their supervisors and co-workers. A better work environment resulted with people willing to accept new challenges.

A major reason Imperial Distributors decided to provide English classes on company time was to reduce the turnover rate which was around 40%. Turnover is a major expense for any company and being able to reduce it represents a major cost reduction. Classes ended in November 2004 and 9 months later all participants were still employed at Imperial Distributors.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF STUDENT INTERVIEWS

FLORENCE OFOSUEE

Florence Ofosue is from Ghana, Africa, speaks Asanti and has been living in the US for four years. She is a resident of Worcester and has a son who is fifteen years old. She enrolled in the EWL class to improve her English and has taken this class for six months. She has received feedback from her boss that her English has improved and is now able to understand the work instructions clearly. Now she is happy with her job and is grateful to Imperial Distributors.

“I have learned many things. Before cannot speak English and now I can...I know to read and speak English and history of America. Helped me to ask to my boss if I have a doctor’s appointment...I speak with teacher of my son in English...If I go to the doctor I can tell to the doctor that I have back pain, before I don’t know how to say.... When I go in a bus I know to ask for change. I speak on phone now but not before...I like CNN...My boss say I speak clearly...I have friends now (those who do not speak her language and they converse in English)... I did not try to talk before (with other co-workers).... I am all set with English”

SILVIA GONZALEZ

Silvia Gonzalez is from Puerto Rico, speaks Spanish and has been living in the US for fourteen years. She enrolled in the class to learn to pronounce English properly. She had taken ESL classes at Quinsigimond Community College for three months. She finds the classes at Imperial Distributors to be more participation oriented and conversation based than the other classes which were mostly lecture oriented.

She is now able to pronounce English better and finds it easy to understand “anything that is English”. She uses her English knowledge outside work especially while shopping. She feels more confident, is motivated to perform better at work and looks forward to developing her knowledge by enrolling in the next level in English education.

“I find everything that I learn useful.... Helps me how to express the correct way in English...I have learned pronunciation from this class...I can speak and understand anything in English...Sometimes when I have a problem I write it down in English so that I say the right word...I bought a new shoes which was not my regular size, which was small...I told the shopkeeper that this size is small and want exchange...I went to the register and spoke to them.... I have problem with my eyes and I explained to my doctor...I watch news and understand every English program in the TV...My boss mentioned about the change in my pronunciation...the right way now.”

MABEL ALVARDO

Mabel Alvarado is from Puerto Rico, speaks Spanish and has been in the US for seven years. She moved to the US as the economy in Puerto Rico was very bad. She has four children, the youngest child goes to school and the others work. She was formerly employed in Filenes Basement Distribution Center.

She uses her English knowledge at work to communicate with her boss, to speak with co-workers who do not speak Spanish and in her social life. She claims to have gained a lot of “confidence in the company” for having helped her to survive and is happy at work as she can understand the instructions of her boss and avoid making errors.

“I need to learn English....I like everything about the EWL class...I enrolled in EWL class for my future...I learned to speak English... Now I understand more my boss.... Now it is nice because I am comfortable to speak English...I was nervous to speak English before now I am not. I am confident...When the boss of my son call my son I talk...I now need no interpreter in Social Security Office if speak slowly. If they talk fast I say excuse me please talk slowly.”

SEN NGUYEN

Sen Nguyen is from Vietnam, speaks Vietnamese and has been in the US for eleven years. She joined the class to relearn the English she studied in a previous class. She is a mother of three children. Her youngest son goes to school and the others work. She had taken an ESL course in California for four months. She seems to have forgotten all she had learned in the previous course.

She says she has learned to write English effectively. She seems to be happy with the class and plans to improve by joining the next level of EWL.

“I want to speak English fluently without making any grammar mistake....If I don't find something in American shop I ask them in English now...I speak to children's teachers I say I speak English slow slow please...”

GLORY BULTED

Glory Bulted is from Puerto Rico speaks Spanish and is in the US for six years. She enrolled in the class to learn to speak English effectively. She has been taking this class for more than a year and has learned to write English better. She understands her supervisor's instructions and uses the knowledge outside of work when she goes shopping and visits a doctor.

“Because I am not talking English I enrolled this class...I don't understand what my supervisor told me before but now I understand.... I learn to write English and write all that is written in the board...I speak to my doctor the directions to his clinic...I used the phone to call the Limo to pick up in airport....Glory! Go to the other line; take the radio (instructed by her supervisor which she executed).

MIRIAM REYAS

Miriam Reyes is from El Salvador and has been in the US for fifteen years. She has two children who to school. She works as a Team Leader, She now feels motivated as she can

understand the instructions of her supervisor and can perform better. She has been working at Imperial Distributors for many years and has been taking the EWL class for six months.

“It is easy now...When I need to say something...when I go to doctor for my kids...Before I had the word in mind but cannot say.... My daughter said your sound is weird and make past, present mistakes...Now I am clear....I learn grammar now...I asked for the price in Sam’s Club...Before I used to answer the phone ‘nobody is here’ and now I am able to speak...I watch English movies now.”

SARA HERNANDEZ

Sara Hernandez is from El Salvador and has been in the US for eight years. She is the mother of three children and the eldest one is in school. She has been in the EWL class for six months. She is motivated with a sense of gratitude towards the organization.

“I need to learn English as it is necessary...I joined the course to speak English with teachers my kids.... I like English, I like everything in ESL class...I ask for price in the mall...sometimes I don’t understand if speak English fast....I understand when boss says No... don’t need a interpreter now....I no want different job as company give opportunity for learn.”

RAMON ARROYO

Ramon Arroyo is from Puerto Rico, speaks Spanish and has been in the US for five years. He is the father of five children who go to school. One of his children is disabled, and he wanted to learn English to speak to the teacher of this child in particular.

After this class, he is able to speak, read and write English. He seems to be happier coming to work and this class has changed his opinion about Imperial Distributors. He appears to have a new sense of loyalty and devotion towards the organization.

“I am shocked if someone speak English,,,I understand nothing...now I know...I went to the Court,,,they asked me something in English I don’t understand...I crossed my hands thinking they are arresting me...After ESL class I understand what they speak in court....they ask my Photo ID....I gave and went to Court....

THANH HAU TRAN

Thanh Hau Tran is from Vietnam, speaks Vietnamese and is a Selector at Imperial. She has been living in the US for thirteen years. She is a mother of three children and one of her daughters goes to Smith College. She was an accountant in Vietnam and had to come to the US because of civil disturbances in Vietnam. She had taken ESL classes for three months a long ago, but says that those classes did not help her to get the confidence she has now.

She enrolled in the EWL classes to improve her vocabulary, learn grammar and to converse in English. After taking this class she is able to watch TV especially CNN which is her favorite channel and tries to understand by reading the captions. She seems to feel good about the job as she can understand and communicate better.

“I want to talk to someone who can listen to me....I want to learn English...I want to talk to someone.....in my country I finished high school and I work accountant for sixteen year...my family came here as refugee...my husband was in jail as he was a republican soldier...then I came US...I learn more grammar and vocabulary and conversation...I usually go for shopping and use the English I learn here...I watch channel 56, 47 and 33...I watch CNN and understand little bit.....I put captions and read and understand...I learn to read English in school but a little bit. My boss said I had to go another line and restart....I understand my boss.....I speak with English and Spanish employees....I feel better about work....as I am comfortable in the company...”

JEANNETTE CABAN

Jeannette Caban is from Puerto Rico, speaks Spanish and works as a Selector at Imperial Distributors. She has been living in the US for five years and has three children. She was a scientific secretary in Puerto Rico. All her children go to school, and she wants to learn English to speak with their teachers. She feels that it is necessary to learn English to survive in the US and believes that she can be independent only if she knows the language. The fact that Imperial Distributors is helping her learn English makes her feel comfortable at work.

“I joined ESL because my supervisor told me...they teach what is necessary to speak English...I can write English...I can go alone now to shop or government office.... before I go with my daughter who speak English....I think my problem is pronunciation...my daughter had problem with her T-shirt, as teacher said her shirt is inappropriate, I said for me it was no bad,....but the school gave her a sweater....The teacher told that I have to know it is not allowed to wear this T-shirt in this school....my daughter is awesome at school...I watch TV programs in English all time and my favorite channel is History and National Geographic.....my boss mentions improvement in my language all the time....my boss told about my English, the commentary and is happy with my English....now I feel better and comfortable about Imperial....before I cannot understand what my boss speaks.....I was not really confident before and now I am happy with my work...”

NORMA FIGUEROA

Norma Figueroa is from Puerto Rico, speaks Spanish and works as a Training Coordinator at Imperial Distributors. She has been living in the US for twenty years and has three children. Her children are working, and she wants to learn English to communicate with her grandchildren. She has taken ESL classes for one year at Quinsigimond Community College, which was taught by a Spanish teacher, and the chance to speak in English was limited. She enrolled in the EWL class to learn English grammar.

She uses her English knowledge to give feedback on the training programs she conducted. It has helped her to communicate better. She feels that Imperial Distributors has given her a good opportunity to develop and looks forward to continue her learning.

“I like everything in this class...I learn a lot...I speak with the teachers of my grandchildren....I have to talk to my grandchildren as they don't speak Spanish....I use to phone to talk to my grandchildren...one of my grandchildren told me I want to learn Spanish and I want to buy a book for him...I spoke to Peter about the training program,

like now I have trained new people and gave him feedback...it is funny because I speak to my daughter-in-law in Spanish and she speaks to me in English....I feel that I am better in English now....I think it is a good opportunity for me to learn English as I have to train people who speak only English...I have to put a comment about the people I train and this class helps me.”

Appendix B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Instructor and Management

JACKIE COELHO

Instructor for ESL class

Hi Jackie, I am Divya. I am doing a return on investment analysis and it would be great if you would provide some information about your students at the EWL class.

Jackie: Sure.

1. How long have you been teaching ESL classes?

A: 14 years.

2. How long have you been teaching the EWL class at Imperial?

A: At Imperial it was for 1 year and 4 months.

3. What was your initial reaction when you came to know the standard of their English knowledge?

A: I felt challenged. The combination of this class was mixed. Some were pretty high and some were low. I soon discovered that some people were semi-illiterate in their own language.

4. How fast did they catch up with the classes?

A: I think it takes a few weeks for everybody to feel comfortable and begin to understand the instructions as I have the tendency not to do things over and over again. So I would say 3 to 4 weeks for them to understand where I was going.

5. Did you find that they were interested in the course?

A: Yes. Absolutely.

6. Would you say that they were proactive in learning and understanding all that they were taught in the class?

A: They are proactive now. The majority was already overloaded with work but when they are here in the class they were willing to contribute and learn. The willingness to attend the class was high.

7. How good was their level of participation?

A: Excellent

8. Did they volunteer in the class to contribute towards others' learning?

A: In the beginning not much. But over time, they were progressive and now much more. Sometimes I will have to say "ok, I will have to talk" and stop them in the middle.

9. Do you think that this class has motivated them to stay committed at work?

A: My personal opinion is that there is no connection.

10. Were they punctual both in terms of attendance and time of arrival?

A: Yes. They were unless they had to be in at work very rarely

PAM O'CONNOR

Position: Supervisor

Divya: Hi Pam, I am Divya. I am doing a return on investment analysis and it would be great if you would provide some information about your students at the EWL class. How long have you been supervising the work of these employees?

A: Ten years

Divya: Did you get to see how the EWL classes are conducted?

A: I have dropped in...may be interrupted.

Divya: Did you find any specific difference between their overall job performance before and after taking this EWL class?

A: The main thing was, they can understand their management now. They can understand English. They are able to communicate with me and other peers as well. This was a big issue in the beginning. If they ask something and I said NO, they would say Yes to me and later call up and say they are sick rather than a direct talk. The communication is a lot better. I would say 85% better.

Divya: Does it make your work better?

A: Oh yes...I need not repeat myself or even get a translator.

Divya: It saves time and efficiency?

A: Yes...both

Divya: Did you find any specific improvements in their English, like understanding your instructions better, speaking correct English etc?

A: Work instructions, during the meeting they know what I am talking about.

Divya: Is there any specific instance where they used their knowledge from the EWL class to communicate with you, like asking for a permission to go early etc?

A: A lot of times we had to make exceptions to the rules, so I have to call for a meeting. We are going to change something today, we have to cancel orders or put this behind the letter. They are able to do that without having me behind them.

Divya: Now that you have given me a percentage, what exactly is the difference between the employees who take this course and the others who did not sign up? How hard is it or how easy it is to work with these people?

A: Most of them who needed it took the class. They cannot understand English and that was the problem. I have some people here that are better now but it is taking me a round about route to make them better as they did not have the language. The language issue.

5. Would you personally recommend this course for employees who have these language issues?

A: Yes. I think it has been a great help.

6. Is there any specific instance wherein these employees spoke with you, say any doubts at work?

A: The two of us take care of all these people, anybody in the EWL class; ten out of fifteen have very poor English knowledge. They can ask a question now and I can give them an answer whether it is about using the computer or about whether things are going on the line etc.

Dr. David: What would be the effect on work, if the employees are not able to ask you whether things are going on the line or any such doubts at work?

A: Sometimes there are changes happening on the lines, and I will have to explain why they are happening and they have no idea what I am talking about. There are these employees leaning on the rack, who don't have a clue as to what I am talking about.

Now, they approach me and say there is some change in the line and can understand what I am talking about at all.

7. Has there been any reduction in the errors they make at work?

A: I talk to them all the time about errors. Before when I talked about errors they could not understand. But, now they can understand their errors and even correct them. You don't know there is an error unless they are made known. EWL classes have made them to understand when I say there is an error. There is no doubt about it. They want to succeed now. Each and everyone going to the EWL class want to succeed.

Divya: Would you say that you anticipate that there would be reduction in the errors in the near future?

A: Yes, Absolutely.

Divya: Do you feel that they are motivated because of this course that is because of the very fact that the company is spending money and time to educate them?

A: Yes. It motivates to know that somebody cares enough to do this one for them. Now that the company is paying for this and absolutely they want to learn.

Divya: Has there been a reduction in employee grievance rates than before?

A: No

10. Has there been any productivity increase in recent days?

A: Yes.

11. Would you say one of the reason for such productivity increase is due to this EWL class, as they are motivated to perform better?

A: I think so because their ability to do the job functions because they understand it. One of the things in our reviews is the ability to understand the job functions.

Divya: Is there anything else, in specific, you would like to say?

A: I myself am very happy about this course. Initially I was frustrated working with these people when they don't know what I am talking and I don't know their language.

MARY FASSETT

Position: Supervisor

Divya: Hi Mary, I am Divya. I am doing a return on investment analysis and it would be great if you would provide some information about your employees attending the EWL classes.

A: Sure.

Divya: How long have you been supervising the work of these employees?

A: 2 years

Divya: Did you get to see how the EWL classes are conducted?

A: No

Divya: Did you find any specific difference between their overall job performance before and after taking EWL class?

A: They were already in the class when I came to the pick line. I was in shipping and receiving previously. They were already up and running and Jeff was responsible then.

Divya: How would you rate their job performance now? Have they improved? What was the information you got from the previous boss?

A: Yes. Jeff had talked about it, and I found significant improvement as I can speak to them now. I wanted to make it known that I have seen the improvements, as I am able to talk to them. Even when I was in pick line before, I had issues of communications. I have covered every department and these employees always needed an interpreter and now they don't need one. They feel comfortable and so do I as they understand me. Once Ramon was in the class, he was able to call himself sick once. I could understand him. I was overwhelmed with him. I was thrilled for him. Because of this class is he is able to speak now.

Divya: Has there been any reduction in the errors they make at work?

A: I think to some extent. But even ones in the class have error problems. I don't want to pinpoint people.

Divya: Do you feel that they are motivated because of this course that is because of the very fact that the company is spending money and time to educate them?

A: Yes I do think so. Some motivation at work where they like to come out and stay for extra hours on their own time. They are willing and don't mind to come back out there now that the company is paying them for the time they are at class.

Divya: Would you say that one of the reasons for such productivity increase is due to this ESL class, as they are motivated to perform better?

A: Some of them, I think it is now. They are willing to see that people are willing to help them to achieve and move on, if they want to.

Dr. David: You said that they are willing to come and stay for an extra hour. What exactly did you mean by that?

A: Before when they were getting paid for an hour they did not have EWL classes. So they will go to class 2:30 to 4:30. So if we wanted them to come back and help us if we are still picking, they would not. Now, with the class from 1:30 to 2:30, some people are willing to help and stay till 3:30, I mean an extra hour.

Dr. David: So, that is a real benefit?

A: Yes. Sure.

Dr. David: So, it is really a question of them willing to work?

A: Well, yes some of them are willing to work. They are willing to come back and give extra hours, which they would not do earlier.

Divya: There are 14 employees in this class. There are also other employees who did not enroll for this course. Do you find any specific difference between these two categories in their job performance, approach and attitude at work?

A: I don't find any specific difference. Some people dropped out of it initially as they had to take the bus or other work. With the changed hours they are more willing to stay long and for extra hours.

Divya: Has there been a reduction in employee grievance rate?

A: I don't see many grievances. But sometimes if they grieve I could not understand. I don't know if they are grieving or just talking to me. I told them "I don't understand you". A lot of them in the group, they solve it among themselves. Now it is easy to understand them, when I give their reviews. I think they understand my reviews as this class has helped them to understand. Otherwise I will have to get somebody else to ensure that they understand what I am talking to them.

Dr. David: Were they able to ask you questions about your evaluation?

A: Yes

Dr. David: In the past, were they able to speak with you?

A: I did not supervise them that long. But I did not have too many questions when I did this year. But I did not know how it was last year.

Divya: Has there been any productivity increase with these employees?

A: Some of them I see their rates have gone up. Last time when I saw them, their rates were in the eighties.

Dr. David: So do you think, because these employees are in the class, there is productivity increase?

A: I think so because if they have a question they can ask me now. Before I think they asked among themselves as they were afraid to ask somebody. They were even afraid to say that there was some problem in the line with somebody.

Dr. David: What would be an example of a problem or issue?

A: Like if they cannot get along with somebody or this person keeps pushing me. A lot of time people don't say anything but they keep going. But some of them can do it now.

10. Would you personally recommend this course for other employees who did not take this class?

A: Yes. But the change in the hours has helped as those who dropped out of the course, enrolled again.

Dr. David: Those are really important things that you have told us.

Divya: Thank you so much. You have contributed a lot towards our research.

Mary: Sure. You are welcome.

PETER MCQUAID Position: Director of Distribution, Productivity and Improvement

Divya: Hi Peter, I am Divya. . I am doing a return on investment analysis and it would be great if you would provide some information about your students at the EWL class. What was the main reason for you to decide upon the EWL classes?

A: It started way back with Clara and because of the existing population from other countries and cultures, who had the skill to do the job but could not communicate. I just wanted them to understand the commands and articulate back to us the responses to our command.

Divya: What were your initial expectations from the EWL class?

A: Sure I did. I expected that they would come out of the class being able understand those commands and also talk back to me.

What is your opinion about the EWL class now?

A: If I were to say in general, the class was a success. I would say there are two of them who want to get out of work and they are in this class. The rest of them really want to learn English. Half of the class had rudimentary English speaking skills, and they have really improved in diction, understanding and are not shy to speak. There is only one person in the group who has not shown any improvement.

Divya: Would you say that the EWL classes have motivated the employees to stay committed towards Imperial?

A: Miriam Reys realizes the value of this class and shows that at work. They do realize all that company does for them.

Divya: Would you say that the reduction in the turnover of these employees taking the EWL courses is because of a feeling of loyalty toward Imperial?

A: For the people who are in this class, yes.

Divya: Have there been any specific performance improvements reported to you recently?

A: When you say the work performance my mind goes to productivity. The other side is the ability to get along in the company like Ramon, whose ability to get along has improved. His productivity was always good but his ability to understand has improved. His daughter was having her sixteen-birthday party and he was able to invite me and also tell me the directions to get there. I am sure he would not have been able to do that six months before.

Divya: Is there any specific feedback you would like to give about the EWL classes?

A: Nothing I have on my fingers right now.

Divya: Is there any specific feedback you would like to give about the employees?

A: Tran has improved a lot and is also learning Spanish. This shows that she is able to communicate with her co-workers.

Divya: Thank you.

HERB DAITCH

Position: Chief Financial Officer

Hi Herb, I am Divya. I am doing a return on investment analysis and it would be great if you would provide some information about your students at the EWL class.

Divya: What was the main reason for you to decide upon the EWL classes?

A: There is a large portion of our population who do not know English. And this creates a lot of communicational problems -the communication of job task, special assignments, training and above all anything that would motivate them. There are two things: 1.someone who is in a new country must know the work language and 2. turnover is always an issue. To make them feel good about where they work and the people they work with and to help them feel better about Imperial and outside of work. Mainly to ensure that the reason to leave Imperial is not because they do not know the working language here.

Divya: What were your initial expectations from the EWL class?

A: I am not personally involved but I did have great expectations that they will speak very well in English after attending few classes which was a big expectation. The feedback I get from supervisors is that these employees feel good about the class.

Divya: What is your opinion about the EWL class now?

A: I think people feel good about themselves and the organization. EWL classes have contributed towards this feeling in the organization. Of course, the change in the time has really worked out well. It has also helped in improving their interaction with other members.

Divya: Would you say that the reduction in the turnover of these employees taking the EWL courses is because of a feeling of loyalty toward Imperial?

A: This is such an insignificant population compared with the total number of employees. It has been a very positive factor. I heard around that the turnover for this group is less than the other lot.

Divya: Would you attribute such loyalty towards the EWL classes?

A: There could be reason believing about positive impacts.

Divya: Has there been any specific performance improvements reported to you recently?

A: I might have to do some research about this as I have no idea at this time. EWL could also increase turnover as you learn a language, you can get a better job and might want to leave the company. Hence, it has its own shortcomings. .

Divya: Thank you.

Herb: Sure.... Absolutely.

JOHN MACKLIN

Position: Chief Of Operations

Divya: Hi John. I want to know your opinion and observations about the EWL classes.

It would be great if you would answer some of my questions.

John: Sure

Divya: What was the main reason for you to decide upon the EWL classes?

A: The whole process started with Clara, the training manager at that time who was looking at opportunities that we could utilize in the distribution center and the company. One of the things that became clear was that we were a melting pot of many different cultures. Many of these people at the distribution center, the only language they knew was their native language, which was either Spanish or any other one. Many times, even filling out the application form was difficult for them, as they have to have some one help them to fill it out. We thought it would be a real advantage to provide them with some knowledge in English language that could help them at work and in their personal life.

Divya: What were your initial expectations from the EWL class?

A: I am not sure we had any. All the concerns were that we have to get work done and wanted to know how much of a disruption to production will that be with the class. Secondly, we were concerned that people thought it had value but did they really think that it had. Thirdly, how many people will enroll for the class, how good the teacher is going to be, whether she will be able to draw the students to the class and get them to participate and make them feel comfortable as they are more comfortable within their own culture, but not at mixed cultures. A prime example is when we go to our cafeteria during lunchtime, they don't sit together, and they sit in their own groups, which is very common. Now you are trying to mix the group and they are trying to learn something together. I guess we were a little apprehensive about that. But the teacher made them feel very comfortable. Jackie is a nice lady, she is very easy going. They felt comfortable with her and built upon her and then very quickly, they reached a point where they started looking forward to the class. I think since we changed the schedule, it has been better than what we used to have before. Prior to this, it was their time for which they were not paid for. Now it is all on the company.

Divya: Do you think after this class, they are volunteering to put in the extra hours?

A: Well, if you are asking if there is anymore loyalty in the company, I don't know how to answer that as it is difficult to measure. These are not brand new employees. They are here for a while, they understand company's culture, they understand the company. I think it helps but it is difficult to measure. It kind of bonds them to the company

Divya: What about the rest of the employees who did not enroll in the ESL class? Do you find any specific differences?

A: I don't the think the rest of work force looks at them as somebody different. I think they are just going to class. Sure all these others are also volunteering for extra hours. I looked at more of a benefit for the employee than for the company.

Dr. David: Has that changed now?

A: It is difficult to measure. There are a couple of people, like this Vietnamese lady, her name is Sen, who goes out the way to engage you in a conversation. She is very excited about it. She asks me “how are you today” and she would never have done that before. She is feeling very **comfortable with her** knowledge. I feel they pick up instructions faster and that is the best part.

Divya: What is your opinion about the EWL class now?

A: I think it is wonderful.

Divya: Would you say that the EWL classes have motivated the employees to stay committed towards Imperial?

A: I think it is one of the reasons as job satisfaction is one. Pay is another thing on the list. People really want to feel good coming to work. When you get up in the morning and did not feel good to go to work, you are going to be miserable and make everybody feel miserable. I think it is one of the factors. It really helps and keeps them in. We have some who have left the program but it is for personal reasons.

Divya: Would you say that the reduction in the turnover of these employees taking the EWL courses is because of a feeling of loyalty toward Imperial?

A: No. The Sen thing that I talked about, she is a small little lady, she is short and finds it difficult to pick something and might get hurt, which we really don’t want her to. But she has always given her 180% at work. She is one of those people who is happy with a smile on her face. Well it is just an improved communication that would improve productivity.

Divya: Is there any specific feedback you would like to give about the employees and the EWL classes?

A: I have nothing but good things to say about this class and the instructor. I heard that a new instructor is coming in, and I think it will be interesting to have a new perspective.

Dr. David: The other thing about it is that I have noticed in my coming here periodically, a change. The interviews that Divya has done with these people have been very interesting and I have sat in on most of them and some of them are very surprising. Ramon for example, when he did not understand her question, he asked her, and there was a dialogue there. One other person was Lourdes who does not speak very well. When she did not understand something, she made the effort to read the question. All of these people are so confident now, just the way they sit. They weren’t afraid to come into this room and meet with her. They were not anxious. It is just a total change.

John: Yes, helps the self-esteem and confidence

Dr. David: Absolutely.

Divya: Thank you so much. This would really help for our research

John: You are welcome

Personal Reflections**Divya Narayanan – Researcher**

Initially I was skeptical about this whole research as I thought it would be very difficult to interview these employees and even if I interviewed them, it would be difficult to get accurate data. When the interview process was on, I was spellbound at their confidence, their body language and the way they were interested in sharing instances in which the EWL classes have helped them. They seem to be motivated and felt that they are committed to the organization with a sense of gratitude. I think that Imperial Distributors has taken the right step not only towards reducing turnover but also creating a better work place targeting the emotional needs of the employees apart from monetary benefits.



CEC International

April 21, 2005

Creative Workplace Learning
311 Washington Street
Brighton, MA 02135

Dear Lloyd:

Thank you very much for sending me your report on the evaluation study done at Imperial Distributors which shows a highly creative and cost-effective method to improve results in the workplace through training. The interesting thing about your method is that it is not a typical technical skills training program but is designed primarily to teach English as a Working Language (EWL).

This study presents evidence of a type of values based change in the workplace which I have never seen before since most studies deal only with higher levels of management and leadership. Your instructional methodology resonates with the approach to leadership and values-based transformation that CEC has successfully applied for over 20 years while helping international companies implement change processes. CEC has long recognized that a comprehensive approach to change involves more than just skills training but development of the emotional, motivational and even personal dimensions that lead to a workplace where all stakeholders are functioning at maximal levels.

What I saw in the Imperial study reflected our approach to organizational effectiveness, but at the level of the shop floor. The study shows that as the EWL program progressed, participants not only learned how to speak English better but also began to satisfy important emotional needs and to build better relationships with co-workers, supervisors, customers, and suppliers.

I would like to discuss with you a way to collaborate on an integrated approach to organizational improvement that incorporates all levels and functions. This collaboration offers a great potential to improve the alignment of employees of all levels to the mission, vision and values of any corporation.

Hans Picker, Ed.D.
President
CEC International